

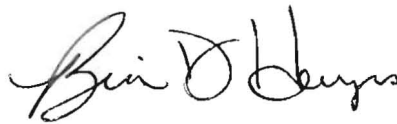
Three Strikes in Stride: Anthony's Story

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Eric Marty

**Thesis Advisor
Brian Hayes**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Hayes", with a stylized, cursive script.

**Ball State University
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Abstract

HIV, Human Immunodeficiency Virus, affects over one million people nationwide. Of those one million people, nearly one in five have not been diagnosed and treated with for the virus. As much of a concern as this should be, many people, like myself, are not properly educated about HIV and the subsequent stage of AIDS, Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The rate of HIV infection has spread most rapidly in this country among African-American women. Brothers United is a nonprofit organization based in Indianapolis that provides outreach and education in hopes of one day eliminating HIV/AIDS. The video of this project corrects some common misconceptions about the virus, most importantly how it is contracted and whom it can affect. One advocate from Brothers United also shares their personal journey in living with HIV and introduces the audience to the testing process. My goal with this project is to educate about HIV/AIDS and the misconceptions that have created the social stigma surrounding the virus. This education will hopefully provide hope for anyone whose life has been affected by the disease.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Brian Hayes for advising me on this project. His journalistic insight and professional experience have helped me throughout my collegiate career. In regards to this project, when flexibility was required, as it often was, he was invaluable with helping develop a solution.

I would also like to thank Anthony and the Brothers United Organization. Anthony's personal story and knowledge brought an emotional and logical appeal essential to the success of this project. The resources, including space and time, provided by both Anthony and Brothers United made this entire project possible.

Finally, I would like to thank Carolyn, my videographer, for her friendship, professionalism, and visual aesthetic throughout the course of this task. As a team, our skills complimented each other, allowing this project to shine and truly meet my own vision.

Author's Statement

In my sixteen years as a student, I can remember exactly three incidences in which the subject of Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and the related Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, was ever broached in discussion. The first time was during my middle school health class, in eighth grade I believe. The discussion was focused on sexually transmitted infections/diseases (STDs), and HIV/AIDS was only specifically mentioned in a fleeting warning. This warning should have been quite appalling and offensive in retrospect. My health teacher was explaining what HIV was to a class of middle school boys. To my recollection, there was no distinction made between HIV and AIDS, and the message seemed to be that if you were diagnosed with either, it was a death sentence. My teacher essentially portrayed HIV/AIDS victims as social pariahs, deserving of isolation and fear. This teacher even went so far as to "theorize" that one could contract the virus simply by using the same toilet after a "carrier." As an unknowing and somewhat naïve teenager, who was just beginning my own journey of self-discovery and acceptance, that class discussion remained seared in my memory for years after middle school.

It wasn't until several years later as a sophomore in college that I came to realize just how misguided and ignorant that perception is. At that time, I had recently come out to several of my friends, who were very supportive. I had talked about certain issues with these friends, including my fear of HIV/AIDS. I had also talked about my fear of coming out to my parents.

One of these friends, then a sexual psychology major, was a strong advocate for gay rights. She was also a mentor of sorts for me during the coming-out process. During this particular semester, she was taking an introductory sexuality course. One night, we were in her dorm room, on a homework date like "good" honors students. Somewhat randomly, she asked me why I had not tried dating any other gay men, seeing as there was a rather strong gay community at Ball State.

I had finally been asked the question I had not wanted to answer, even though I knew very well what the answer was. As irrational as it may seem to someone on the outside, that moment in my middle school health class tainted my perception of who I could be. Even though I had come to terms with my sexuality enough to disclose that information with trusted friends, I was not so confident as to think that I could be a different gay man than the stereotype that was constantly presented to me growing up. Gay men were supposed to be promiscuous and irresponsible. But that certainly wasn't me. My fear of fitting into that stereotype was socially paralyzing. It was preventing me from developing social and relationship skills, and growing more comfortable with myself.

After explaining this fear to my friend, she told me about a panel of HIV advocates who had come to speak to her sexuality class. She reiterated what those advocates had discussed in her class, such as how HIV is actually contracted and spread. Then, feeling slightly foolish in that moment, I had a moment of realization. I realized that everything my friend was telling me made perfect sense, and being a logical person, I also admitted the truth about my fear. It was actually not fear at all that had been hindering my growth. It was an excuse; a crutch I had used to rationalize my

deeper fear about coming out to the people I had never wanted to disappoint: my parents.

Yet, in that moment, I was no longer handicapped. That moment changed my perspective on who I was. It gave me a silent but strong confidence that helped shape the man I have become. And it was then that I decided too many gay teens, surrounded by ignorance just as I had been growing up, needed this message just as much as I did, if not even more. Some of these young men and women may not have access to the same internal and external resources I benefitted from. And for some even more unfortunate, this perception of HIV is not just a crutch; it is a belief. That is when I decided I needed to use my skills as best I could to spread this truth that HIV does not have to be the end of anyone's road.

I decided to produce my project in a video format for several reasons. The first reason was that over the course of my collegiate career, I have gained a lot of experience and knowledge about multimedia journalism through my work with Ball Bearings Online. Therefore, I wanted to take on a project that would challenge all of the journalism skills I have acquired, most prominently my interviewing and production skills. The second reason was that I knew when deciding on this topic that HIV is very personal and most often scary when one is first diagnosed. Since I wanted my primary audience to be potential victims (for lack of a better term) who were seeking information about the virus itself, as well as testing and treatment procedures, I wanted to use a source who had experience in working this audience. For visual and emotional appeal, I determined that video in the form of a personal story would be the most compelling way to make a connection with my audience.

Once the decision was made that I would produce a journalistically styled video for my project, I contacted Mr. John Mulcahy, Associate Director of the Office of Research Integrity at Ball State. Mr. Mulcahy determined that because my project was in the interests of journalism, IRB approval was not required. "After reviewing your thesis, you will not be required to have IRB approval. But please be in mind of the questions and the sensitive nature of the topic," said Mr. Mulcahy in an email correspondence with me, which I have provided as a supplement to this project.

There were professional challenges I overcame as well during the course of this project. The most significant of these challenges was finding a source who would be willing to speak candidly on camera about their HIV status and the accompanying personal struggles. This exhaustive search lasted several months. I used academic and personal contacts to find a source, and with the help of Dr. George Gaither of Ball State's psychology department, I eventually found someone willing to speak openly about their experience.

Anthony is an HIV advocate from Brothers United, a non-profit based in Indianapolis. Brothers United provides outreach and educational resources to people in the Indianapolis area living with HIV. Despite his strong advocacy efforts and breadth of knowledge about HIV and its effects, Anthony had not at the time of our interview disclosed his HIV status to family members with whom he lived. Therefore, he was not comfortable with allowing video footage to be shot at his residence. The sensitivity of this subject forced me to analyze my journalistic ethics in depth. One of the central concepts of my original vision was to have distinct visual representations of Anthony's personal life as it is affected, or not affected in some scenarios, by his HIV status.

These visuals were to help communicate to my audience, some of whom may have mistaken stereotypes or fears such as myself, the idea that living a “normal” life with HIV is possible through healthy habits.

However, I decided to view this as an opportunity rather than a setback. When putting myself in Anthony’s personal situation, I decided that I too would rather disclose my status to family in person than through a video interview intended for another primary audience. I also determined that it was my journalistic duty to protect my source, and that I could do so while still communicating my intended message. I made an executive decision to use Anthony’s extended experience with and knowledge of HIV to highlight a message of hope. In order to communicate the power of this experience and knowledge, I decided to interview Anthony at the Brothers United offices. This was to provide a comfortable setting for Anthony in which I would have access to additional resources that he could explain for the purposes of this video.

Before the interview, Carolyn, my videographer, and I determined that we would include B-roll footage of Anthony walking around Circle Center in downtown Indianapolis. Circle Center is a thriving hotspot of activity. The energetic vibes from the people and action surrounding us helped portray an image of vitality that was essential to the central concept of this project. This footage was interspersed to break up the interview footage and provide visual dynamism. In this respect, Carolyn’s aesthetic was invaluable, and her vision fit perfectly with my own.

During the interview, I decided to first focus my line of questioning on the mission of Brothers United, as well as other organizations and agencies with which they work. I also asked several questions about how Brothers United reaches their targeted

outreach group. From there, Anthony discussed the services the organization provides. During these questions, Anthony told how one of the key goals of Brothers United is to make people aware of their options for anonymous testing. I included these sections of the interview in the video to provide educational and awareness background.

With the logistical side of the story covered, I then geared my questioning more toward the personal side of living with HIV. With this line of questioning, my goal was to prove wrong many misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. One of the most shocking pieces of information that Anthony shared during this part of the interview was the disproportionate rate of HIV infection among the African-American community, particularly among African-American women. This exposed one misconception I had never analyzed before. Prior to this interview, I knew that HIV/AIDS had been spreading rapidly among women and mothers in Sub-Saharan Africa. I had personally attributed this to lack of education about the disease and adequate medical resources for treatment. I had assumed, quite incorrectly, that such resources would be readily available in developed nations like the U.S.

However, Anthony, himself a member of the African-American community, reasoned that in the African-American community, those living with HIV “have three strikes against them.” His assertion was that church, school and family are the three pillars of the African-American community. Yet in schools, according to Anthony, sex education rarely focuses on homosexuality or HIV/AIDS. He further asserted that churches, viewing homosexuality as a sin, rarely discuss the issue of HIV/AIDS, and in a domino effect, families are affected by the lack of education provided by those other two pillars. While this is not scientifically conclusive reasoning, it seems very plausible

to me, and I felt it was extremely important to include that perspective, from someone who is a part of the African-American community, in my video. From this concept, the reworked title of my project was born: Three Strikes in Stride: Anthony's Story.

From there, I wanted to end the video on a hopeful note that emphasized the possibility of a life that does not constantly involve worry and defeat. Anthony stressed the need to live a healthy lifestyle, mentally and physically. This includes a healthy diet, regular exercise, HIV medications, and sexual responsibility.

The supplemental part of the video deals with HIV testing. For this part of the video, I had Anthony sit down and walk me through the process, as if I was a client coming to Brothers United. Anthony gave a step-by-step explanation, also explaining some terminology associated with HIV/AIDS and testing in general. This last component was key because it will give viewers a reference point. From that reference, they will know what to expect if or when they get testing, and some of the necessary questions they should be prepared to answer.

This project was not just a summative assessment of my collegiate career and my studies in the Honors College. This project challenged me personally in ways I could have never imagined when I submitted my proposal. I have grown in my understanding of others and myself. I have also had the opportunity to meet and work with some great and highly motivated individuals, including Anthony, my videographer Carolyn Case, Dr. George Gaither, and my adviser, Professor Brian Hayes. None of this would have been possible without their contributions.

I feel somewhat ashamed to say this, but I had never really had an in-depth conversation with another gay man. I have had many great friends, some of whom I

have mentioned in this paper, who have helped me on my journey to self-discovery.

Yet, in many ways, my time spent working with Anthony filled a final gap in my self-perspective. It was inspiring to see someone who has exhibited so much perseverance in the face of tremendous personal adversity. His life experiences have put my own into perspective. I realize that it is always possible to find personal strength and hope.

Defeat is a matter of perspective, and perspective can be changed. If only one message comes across from my video, I want it to be this: HIV does not have to control anyone's life; rather, HIV can be controlled by anyone.



Eric Marty <eric.marty.360@gmail.com>

Honors Thesis IRB Question

6 messages

Eric Marty <eric.marty.360@gmail.com>
To: jmulcahy@bsu.edu

Sat, Dec 8, 2012 at 11:03 AM

Mr. Mulcahy,

Hello, I am a senior journalism education major working on my Honors Thesis project. I have been talking to Dr. Stedman, and she suggested I send you an email to confirm the necessity of me going through IRB approval for my project. I have attached my proposal for you to look over, and I was hoping you could tell me whether my project will be exempt or expedited.

Thank you for your time,

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Eric Marty
Ball State University
Ball Bearings Producer
BSU Society of Professional Journalists President
BSU Oxfam America
Journalism Education Association
Ingelhart News Scholars
eric.marty.360@gmail.com



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Mulcahy, John <jmulcahy@bsu.edu>
To: Eric Marty <eric.marty.360@gmail.com>

Mon, Dec 10, 2012 at 9:06 AM

Hello Eric,

After reviewing your thesis, you will not be required to have IRB approval. But please be in mind of the questions and the sensitive nature of the topic.

Let me know if you have any other questions.

Thanks,

John

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